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# **Gender effects on consumers' attitudes towards comedic violence in advertisements**

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# **Gender effects on consumers' attitudes towards comedic violence in advertisements**

This study examined gender's effects on attitudes and tendencies to share online ads containing comedic violence. The results show that males enjoyed comedic violence more than females, when the perpetrator of the comedic violence was male, regardless of the victim's sex; and, when the perpetrator and victim were both female. When the perpetrator and victim were of different sexes, the impact of attitudes towards comedic violence on sharing the ad varied by gender. However, when the victim and perpetrator were of the same sex, there was no significant gender difference in the effects of attitudes toward sharing the ad.

Keywords: comedic violence advertisements; gender permutation; disposition theory; attitudes towards comedic violence ads; tendency to share comedic violence ads

## **Introduction**

Marketers have increasingly employed gendered comedic violence in ads as a messaging technique (Blackford et al., 2011; Eisend, 2018; Gurrieri et al., 2016; Huhmann & Limbu, 2016; Scharrer, 2004; Van Hellemonst & Van den Bulck, 2012). Gendered comedic violence, defined as disparagement or humorous violence directed toward individuals in relation to stereotyped gender characteristics or roles (Yoon & Kim, 2014), is valued for its capacity to enhance the viewer's involvement, recognition, and recall of ads (Brown et al., 2010; Yoon & Kim, 2014). Traditionally, the dominant gender-power stereotypes in advertising were the "rational men versus emotional women" and "aggressive men versus passive women" (Gulas et al., 2010). Other studies have showed that, while men were traditionally presented in ads as independent, authoritarian, and/or professional (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004), women were routinely portrayed as decorative (sexy), family-oriented, and/or demure (Uray & Burnaz, 2003). Even in the modern era, media still predominantly depict gender-power stereotypes

centered on the objectification of women and violence against men (Gulas et al., 2010; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008).

However, the widespread employment of gendered comedic violence in ads has triggered concerns about the harmful effects of such practices (Gurrieri et al., 2016). Gender-stereotyped ads are problematic when they shape expectations about genders or restrict opportunities for the gender being stereotyped (Zotos & Grau, 2016). These concerns are rooted in the assumption that advertising has the potential to shape and reinforce social values and attitudes towards the images and stereotypes being advertised (Pollay, 1987).

Consequently, several initiatives have been set up to advocate for appropriate gender representation in ads (Van Hellemonst & Van den Bulck, 2012), such as [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com) for women's rights and [mensactivism.org](http://mensactivism.org) for men's rights. The European Advertising Standards Authority, guided by the International Chamber of Commerce's Article 4 on social responsibility, also promote positive gender portrayals in all marketing communications.

Despite rising concerns about the harmful effects of gender-stereotyped portrayals in ads, our understanding of consumers' attitudes toward gendered comedic violence is still limited (Yoon & Lee, 2018). A growing field of research (Gulas et al., 2010; Swani et al., 2013; Yoon & Kim, 2014) suggests that a person's gender influences their perception of comedic violence in ads. However, the role of gender in the perception of comedic violence, in ads involving males and females in contrasting roles of perpetrator or victim of the comedic violence, is still under-researched. (Swani et al., 2013, p. 318) recognized the importance of gender permutations in the execution of comedic violence ads and recommended further investigation of "the effectiveness of violent humor ads across gender where the victim is male or female with the perpetrator being female or male, respectively." The importance of this topic also manifested in calls by others for further study (e.g., Roux et al., 2017). The results of such studies would also help inform self-regulatory organizations

and governments agencies as to what policies concerning the portrayal of gender in ads would be appropriate.

Therefore, this study contributes to the long-standing research interest in gaining insights into the social and commercial implications and consequences of employing gender stereotypes in ads (Hawkins & Coney, 1976; McArthur & Resko, 1975). Hence, the present study investigates the influence of gender on people's attitudes toward gendered comedic violence in ads, as well as their intentions regarding sharing those ads (Nikolinakou & King, 2018; Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillmann, 1983).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, the relevant published literature is reviewed, focusing on the theoretical background of the study, hypothesized relationships, and the theories supporting the hypotheses. Next, the research method is outlined. Then, the study's results and conclusions are presented, followed by an outline of the research's limitations, and recommendations for further research.

## **Theoretical background and hypotheses**

### *Comedic violence*

Comedic violence is a marketing communication strategy that combines humor and violence, with the violence meted out humorously (Yoon & Kim, 2014; Yoon & Lee, 2018). In the advertising context, violence refers to the explicit depiction of a credible physical or psychological threat toward an individual or group (Kunkel et al., 1995). Violent content in ads attracts attention and increases ad recall and recognition (Brown et al., 2010; Yoon & Kim, 2014). However, extreme violence in ads can provoke negative attitudes toward the ad (Brown et al., 2010; Gunter et al., 2001). Consumers who disapprove of violence in ads can complain to self-regulatory organizations, and those complaints can harm the reputation of the advertised brand.

Humor, an even more complex construct, is conceptualized into three broad categories. (1) Incongruity, the recognition of a discrepancy between expected and actual events, induces laughter through surprise or catharsis (Nerhardt, 1970). (2) Relief is the evocation of tension within a playful setting, followed by a resolution of the tension (Speck, 1991). The relief, or tension resolution, causes a pleasurable sensation in the form of laughter (Speck, 1991; Yoon & Kim, 2014). (3) Humor of superiority, also known as disparagement, is typically an interpersonal attack or verbal put-down often couched in playfulness (Kim & Yoon, 2014; Swani et al., 2013). Typically, disparagement is delivered in the form of comments that are intended to elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target, usually an individual, social group, or political ideology (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). As disparagement humor is typically a tendentious joke inflicted playfully, the denigration of its target uniquely stifles challenges or criticism (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). Disparagement humor is aggressive comedy, and therefore a form of comedic violence (Swani et al., 2013). Humor in ads, if well received, can attract attention to the ad, increase ad recognition, recall, and likability (Flaherty et al., 2004; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). Failed humor, however, even if well intended, can create the perception that an ad is annoying, or that the brand is bad (Swani et al., 2013).

Pairing violence with humor presents further complications, since a comedic display of violence can decrease or increase the perceived consequences of that violence. One area of research concluded that audiences generally disprove of extreme violence in comedic violence ads, unless the violence appears to be justified or results in only negligible pain (Atkin, 1983; Lometti, 1995). Recent studies have shown that humorous ads depicting extreme violence with severe consequences can enhance viewers' engagement with the ads and increase the likelihood of sharing the content with third-party viewers (Brown et al., 2010; Eisend, 2018). Ironically, the "shock" effect of comedic violence in ads tends to

stimulate viral marketing of the ads (Brown et al., 2010; Ewing et al., 2014). Viral marketing, i.e., the instantaneous dissemination of online marketing content through social networks, is a coveted marketing communication method (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Swanepoel et al., 2009). The rising popularity of online video sharing websites, such as YouTube and Vimeo, has created an environment that has enabled viral marketing to grow in importance (Yoon & Kim, 2014).

Therefore, this study investigates gender's effects on attitudes toward comedic violence and on viewer's intentions to disseminate images of that comedic violence. More specifically, this study applies the biological sex premise (Groch, 1974) and disposition theory (Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillmann, 1983) to investigate: (i) gender's effects on consumer attitudes toward comedic violence in ads, (ii) viewers' intentions to share the ads online, and (iii) the influence of consumers' attitudes toward comedic violence in ads on their intentions to share those ads. These three items are explored across all four possible gender permutations; namely, (1) male perpetrator vs. male victim; (2) male perpetrator vs. female victim; (3) female perpetrator vs. male victim; and, (4) female perpetrator vs. female victim.

### *Hypothesis Development*

A large body of research (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015) suggested that biological-sex differences were the major causes of predispositions toward violence. These studies showed that men were more supportive of violence than women were, across a wide range of social contexts. In the context of comedic violence, prior studies have shown that sex differences in humorous violence preferences are fixed in childhood, with boys more likely than girls to initiate humor involving aggression and malice, and girls more likely to prefer humor based on incongruity and surprise (Groch, 1974). These biological-sex differences in humor preferences persisted into adulthood, with men showing greater preferences than women for humor involving malice (Prerost, 1995;

Unger, 1996) or sexual innuendo (Groch, 1974). Recent studies (e.g., Swani et al., 2013) confirmed that men tended to prefer humor with violent content more than women did. Although preferences toward comedic violence were nuanced (Swani et al., 2013), studies have shown that masculinity has a greater influence on comedic violence preferences than femininity (Yoon & Kim, 2014).

Additionally, some studies (e.g., Berger & Milkman, 2012) have shown that video content that evokes highly positive emotions (e.g., surprise or joy) or extremely negative feelings (e.g., anger or anxiety) is more likely to be shared than less emotional content. Furthermore, more likeable videos are more likely to be shared (Shehu et al., 2016). Given that men tend to like comedic violence more than women (Swani et al., 2013), and that comedic violence is likely to evoke extreme emotions (positive or negative) (Berger & Milkman, 2012), we hypothesize that:

H1: In comedic violence ads where the victim and the perpetrator are of the same sex, male viewers will show more positive attitudes toward the ads (H1a) and will share the ads more often (H1b) than female viewers.

We drew on disposition theory in order to explain the relative attitudes of males and females toward comedic violence in ads, and their relative likelihoods of sharing those ads, when the genders of the victim and perpetrator are different. According to disposition theory (Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillmann, 1983), individuals are more likely to enjoy jokes at the expense of people they are negatively, rather than positively, disposed toward. In the context of gendered comedic violence, disposition theory suggests that men are less likely than women to enjoy comedic violence directed at men. Equally, women should be less inclined than men to appreciate jokes at the expense of women. However, earlier studies (e.g., Cantor, 1976) established that disposition theory only applied to men, with women's responses largely



contradicting disposition theory. In one of her experiments, Cantor (1976) approached men and women with the following joke:

An actor whose autobiography had just been published was asked by an actress at a party: 'I have just read your new book ... Who wrote it for you?' 'I am glad you liked it', he replied. 'Who read it to you?' (Kotthoff, 2000, p. 58).

The same joke was also presented in reverse gender order, with the actress meting out the putdown joke to the actor. Both men and women enjoyed the joke when the perpetrator of the putdown joke was a man, with men being more amused than women. However, only men were amused when the roles were reversed and the actress delivered the putdown joke, although they were less amused than when the actor triumphed. This supported disposition theory. In contrast, women were not amused at all when the actress delivered the punchline to the actor, which contradicted disposition theory.

Some researchers (e.g., Kotthoff, 2000) have attributed women's self-deprecating behavior to their circumstances in traditional patriarchal societies, which predominantly favored men over women. Comedic violence at the expense of women is more likely to be accepted in those societies. For example, women used to be the prime target for comedic violence in ads, following stereotypical statements such as "women are emotional/men are rational" (Gulas et al., 2010) and "women are passive/men are aggressive" (Goffman, 1979). Several studies (e.g., Cantor, 1976; Kotthoff, 2000; Pizzini, 1991) have suggested that these ads amused women because women's capacities to self-deprecate were more developed than men. In patriarchal societies, women can develop greater distances from their roles than men. In those circumstances, women can enjoy jokes at their own expenses the same way they accept the burden of their subordinate female roles (Kotthoff, 2000).

However, other studies have shown that self-deprecating responses to comedic violence only applied to women who held traditional sex-role values (Chapman & Gadfield,

1976) or had low incomes (McGhee & Duffey, 1983). Women who subscribed to feminist values or had high-paying jobs responded to gendered comedic violence in accordance with disposition theory (McGhee & Lloyd, 1981). As gender equality in domestic and career roles rose in many societies, and traditional sex role boundaries between the genders began to fade (Strutton, 1996), comedic violence in ads began to denigrate both women (Gurrieri et al., 2016) and men (Gulas et al., 2010). Moore et al. (1987) concluded that disposition theory applied to both men and women in societies that held less stereotypical attitudes toward women. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: In comedic violence ads where the victim is male, and the perpetrator is female, female viewers will display more positive attitudes toward the ads (H2a) and have a greater tendency than male viewers to share the ads (H2b).

H3: In comedic violence ads where the victim is female, and the perpetrator is male, male viewers will display more positive attitudes toward the ads (H3a) and have a greater tendency than female viewers to share the ads (H3b).

This third hypothesis assesses the moderating influence of gender on the relationship between attitudes toward comedic violence ( $A_{cv}$ ) in ads and the sharing of those ads. Past studies have demonstrated that ads that evoke intense emotions, such as surprise, are more likely to be shared than ads with unemotional stimuli (Dobele et al., 2007; Phelps et al., 2004). Therefore, it can be argued that individuals who experience intense emotions when exposed to comedic violence are more likely to share those ads. (Brown et al., 2010) concluded that comedic violence ads with severe consequences are more likely to be shared. Therefore, given that male viewers are expected to show more positive attitudes toward comedic violence ads, and share them more often than female viewers, when the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex, as hypothesized in H1, we further hypothesize that:

H4: In comedic violence ads where the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex, the impact of attitudes toward comedic violence ( $A_{cv}$ ) on sharing the ads is higher for men than women.

Furthermore, since male viewers should have more positive attitudes toward the comedic violence ads, and be more likely to share them when the victim is female and the perpetrator is male (see H3), we further hypothesize that:

H5: In comedic violence ads where the perpetrator is male and the victim is female, the impact of  $A_{cv}$  on sharing the ads is higher for men than women.

Given hypothesis H2, that female viewers are expected to display more positive attitudes toward comedic violence ads and greater tendencies to share the ads than male viewers in ads where the victim is male and the perpetrator is female, we further argue that:

H6: In comedic violence ads where the perpetrator is female and the victim is male, the impact of  $A_{cv}$  on sharing the ads is higher for women than men.

## **Methods**

### *Participants and Stimuli*

The study conducted an online web-based survey. The online survey method was preferred for its ability to reach many respondents cheaply and quickly (Yoon & Kim, 2014). Four postgraduate students collected the data. The research assistants searched the Internet and identified 20 videos that depicted comedic violence. Four video ads were then selected, based on the following criteria: (1) the ads contained comedic violence, (2) each video ad depicted a unique configuration of the four possible gender roles for perpetrator and victim in the comedic violence, and (3) the advertisement for products or services was relevant to both sexes. In addition, existing online videos were preferred over creating new videos for the study, due to the study's limited resources.

The first video was a 40-second “Dollar Shave Club” ad on the convenience of online shopping, in which a male victimized another male. The ad starts with a male shopper in a store unsuccessfully trying to open a razor blade case. The shopper then approaches a male shop assistant standing behind the counter to ask for help opening the razor blade case. The shop assistant disdainfully asks the shopper, “Why would you want to open the case?” “To grab some razor blades,” the shopper replies. The shopping assistant then retorts, “To grab some razor blades?” Soon afterward, the shop assistant violently shocks the shopper in the chest with electricity, and the shocked shopper falls to the ground. Then, a third man casually walks over the sprawled, motionless shopper, pointing out how much easier it is to buy packed razor blades online from Dollar Shave Club than from a store.

The second video is a 76-second advert where a male victimizes a female from “Domestic Violence Commercial (Australian),” which was aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence. The ad opens with a couple (a man and a woman) in a house. The couple is sitting at a table, quietly eating food and in a tense mood. The voices of a second couple (man and woman) shouting at each other are heard from an adjacent room. Then, a banging sound and an anxious female voice are heard from the quarrelling couple’s room. The first couple glances at each other in surprise at the increasingly desperate situation next door. The man from the first couple then stops eating, grabs a bludgeon, and walks toward the door of the quarreling couple. As the first man stands at the door holding the bludgeon, the second male shouts, “You know what’s coming next!” The man with the bludgeon then knocks at the door and hands the bludgeon to the man engaged in an argument, ominously telling the man “Thought you could use this.”

The third video, presenting a female victimizing a male, is a 48-second “People hate Californians: Pepper Spray and Taser” ad that encourages the use of travel maps instead of asking for directions from strangers. The video opens with a man on a California street

walking toward a woman to ask for directions. The woman suddenly pulls out a bottle and sprays pepper into the eyes of the hapless man. The man falls, screaming in pain. The woman continues to pepper-spray the man, who writhes and screams in pain. After emptying her can of pepper spray, the woman then electrocutes the man with a Taser.

The fourth video is a 50-second “Better shop online” commercial where a female victimizes a female. The action takes place in a large shopping center with a vast selection of clothes. A female shopper picks up a garment from a display table. Then, another female shopper comes up and attempts to grab the garment from the first shopper. A garment-pulling duel breaks out between the two women. The first shopper slaps the second one hard, and then tries to walk away. The second shopper runs screaming toward the first shopper and climbs on her back. The second woman bites off a piece of the first woman’s ear. The first shopper, blood dripping from her nose, retaliates by ripping off the right hand of the second shopper. More fights break out in the background, followed by the words, “Better shop online!”

The research assistants located respondents through social media contacts, Internet chat rooms, and emails. The participants participated voluntarily and were assured of confidentiality. The respondents were asked to complete an online questionnaire for each of the four online videos. Therefore, every respondent viewed all four videos and answered questions on each one. A total of 233 usable questionnaires were collected. Although it was not feasible to calculate the response rate for surveys conducted via social media, we considered the usable questionnaires to be adequate for the study.

### *Measures*

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with eight statements measuring their attitudes toward the comedic violence they had watched. The items used a seven-point scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The

statements were compiled from validated attitude scales (Manyiwa & Brennan, 2012). The statements given to the respondents to rate were: I find this video inappropriate; I find this video immoral; I find this video irritating; I find this video offensive; I find this video acceptable; I find this video of good taste; I find this video pleasant; and I find this video amusing.

The “intention to share” scale was measured using the following 2-item scale adopted from Eckler and Bolls (2011): (1) “I will recommend this video to others,” and (2) “This video is worth sharing with others.” The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the two statements on a seven-point scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree.

### *Analysis methods*

We applied partial least squares (PLS) path modeling, as implemented in the PLS path modeling (PLSpm) R package, as our means of statistical analysis. We chose PLSpm for three reasons: outer measurement operationalization, distributional assumptions, and sample size (Henseler et al., 2009). We applied bootstrapping with 5,000 bootstrap samples to obtain inference statistics. We performed a PLS analysis with four samples, corresponding to each one of the four video advertisements. The internal consistency reliability was estimated using Cronbach alpha and Jöreskog’s rho. We assessed convergent validity by using the average variance extracted (AVE). We relied on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria to assess discriminant validity.

## **Research findings**

### *Sample characteristics*

The sample respondents were almost evenly distributed between males (46%) and females (54%). The respondents' age percentage distribution was as follows: between 18-24 years old, 24%; 25-34, 41%; 35-49, 19%; 50-65, 15%; Over 65, 1%). Thus, respondents were young, with 65% of the respondents under 35 years of age, and 16% over 65 years old. The study attracted relatively young respondents because most contacts were either still in university or had left in the past 10 years. In addition, the social networks used to recruit respondents were biased toward young and middle-aged users. However, we expected that the age distribution of the respondents would have a minimal influence on the study's results.

### *Measurement validation*

Table 1 presents the results of the construct measurements for each of the four questionnaires. All constructs exhibited sufficient levels of internal consistency reliability, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1967). All AVE values were above the critical value of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which indicated that all constructs were unidimensional and implied convergent validity. Comparing the square root of each construct's AVE with its largest absolute correlation indicated that the Fornell-Larcker criterion was met. Therefore, discriminant validity can also be confirmed.

**Table 1. Construct Measurement.**

	Standardized loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Jöreskog's rho	Composite reliability	AVE
<b>Video 1: A man victimizing another man</b>					
<b>ATTITUDE</b>		0.923	0.937	.930	.636
I find this video inappropriate (-)	.700				
I find this video immoral (-)	.751				
I find this video irritating (-)	.840				
I find this video offensive (-)	.687				
I find this video acceptable	.822				
I find this video of good taste	.854				
I find this video pleasant	.866				
I find this video amusing	.837				
<b>INTENTION TO SHARE</b>		.940	.971	.970	.943
I will recommend this video to others	.969				
This video is worth sharing with others	.973				
<b>Video 2: A man victimizing a woman</b>					
<b>ATTITUDE</b>		.934	.946	.950	.683
I find this video inappropriate (-)	.865				
I find this video immoral (-)	.815				

I find this video irritating (-)	.829				
I find this video offensive (-)	.770				
I find this video acceptable	.844				
I find this video of good taste	.850				
I find this video pleasant	.778				
I find this video amusing	.857				
<b>INTENTION TO SHARE</b>		.944	.973	.970	.948
I will recommend this video to others	.974				
This video is worth sharing with others	.973				
<b>Video 3: A woman victimizing a man</b>					
<b>ATTITUDE</b>		.901	.923	.920	.605
I find this video inappropriate (-)	.798				
I find this video immoral (-)	.762				
I find this video irritating (-)	.824				
I find this video offensive (-)	.777				
I find this video acceptable	.862				
I find this video of good taste	.859				
I find this video pleasant	.384				
I find this video amusing	.845				
<b>INTENTION TO SHARE</b>		.952	.976	.977	.955
I will recommend this video to others	.976				
This video is worth sharing with others	.978				
<b>Video 4: A woman victimizing another woman</b>					
<b>ATTITUDE</b>		.891	.916	.916	.587
I find this video inappropriate (-)	.804				
I find this video immoral (-)	.846				
I find this video irritating (-)	.807				
I find this video offensive (-)	.836				
I find this video acceptable	.897				
I find this video of good taste	.842				
I find this video pleasant	.542				
I find this video amusing	.420				
<b>INTENTION TO SHARE</b>		.954	.977	.978	.956
I will recommend this video to others	.977				
This video is worth sharing with others	.979				

### *Hypothesis testing*

Table 2 exhibits the structural model analysis and hypothesis testing results. The mean values in Table 2 (where the middle value on the scale was 4) reveal that only the attitudes of men toward male-on-male comedic violence were positive. Apart from that, respondents disliked the comedic violence in all four videos. Additionally, respondents were disinclined to share all four comedic violence videos.

The hypothesis tests produced mixed results. As seen in Table 2, the mean attitude toward comedic violence video 1 was 4.161 for men and 3.248 for women, for a mean gender difference of 0.913 (se=0.254, t=4.811, p=.000). The mean attitude toward comedic violence



video 4 was 3.806 for men and 3.370 for women, for a mean gender difference of 0.437 (se=0.195, t=2.238, p=.026). These results supported H1a; that is, in comedic violence ads where the victim and the perpetrator were of the same sex, male viewers exhibited more positive attitudes toward the ads.

**Table 2. Structural model results.**

Latent variables, pathways and related hypotheses	Mean	Path Coefficient	Standard error	T value	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
<b>Video 1: A man victimizing another man</b>						
<i>Whole sample</i>						
Intention to share	2.534					
Attitude	3.663					
Attitude->Intention to share		.602	.052	11.500	.363	.000
<i>Male subsample</i>						
Intention to share	2.959					
Attitude	4.161					
Attitude->Intention to share		.576	.080	7.180	.331	.000
<i>Female subsample</i>						
Intention to share	2.179					
Attitude	3.248					
Attitude->Intention to share		.611	.071	8.63	.373	.000
<i>Test of gender differences</i>						
Intention to share (H1b)	.780		.219	3.560		.000
Attitude (H1a)	.913		.254	4.811		.000
Attitude->Intention to share (H4)		-.035	.140	.2473		n.s.
<b>Video 2: A man victimizing a woman</b>						
<i>Whole sample</i>						
Intention to share	2.227					
Attitude	2.822					
Attitude->Intention to share		.718	.046	15.700	.516	.000
<i>Male subsample</i>						
Intention to share	2.628					
Attitude	3.344					
Attitude->Intention to share		.601	.078	7.68	0.362	.000
<i>Female subsample</i>						
Intention to share	1.893					
Attitude	2.386					
Attitude->Intention to share		.821	.051	16.100	.673	.000
<i>Test of gender differences</i>						
Intention to share (H2b)	.734		.218	3.361		.001
Attitude (H2a)	.958		.191	5.025		.000
Attitude->Intention to share (H5)		-.219	.078	2.815		.003
<b>Video 3: A woman victimizing a man</b>						
<i>Whole sample</i>						
Intention to share	2.424					
Attitude	3.319					
Attitude->Intention to share		.667	.049	13.600	.444	.000
<i>Male subsample</i>						
Intention to share	2.867					
Attitude	3.767					
Attitude->Intention to share		.580	.080	7.260	.336	.000
<i>Female subsample</i>						

Intention to share	2.055					
Attitude	2.944					
Attitude->Intention to share		.730	.061	11.500	.532	.000
<i>Test of gender differences</i>						
Intention to share (H3b)	.812		.216	3.762		.000
Attitude (H3a)	.823		.194	4.236		.000
Attitude->Intention to share (H6)		-.150	.041	1.608		.059
<b>Video 4: A woman victimizing another woman</b>						
<i>Whole sample</i>						
Intention to share	3.269					
Attitude	3.569					
Attitude->Intention to share		.623	.052	12.100	.388	.000
<i>Male subsample</i>						
Intention to share	3.348					
Attitude	3.806					
Attitude->Intention to share		.563	.081	6.940	.317	.000
<i>Female subsample</i>						
Intention to share	3.203					
Attitude	3.370					
Attitude->Intention to share		.689	.065	10.600	.475	.000
<i>Test of gender differences</i>						
Intention to share (H1b)	.144		.263	.551		n.s.
Attitude (H1a)	.437		.195	2.238		.026
Attitude->Intention to share (H4)		-.127	.088	1.436		.076

Similarly, Table 2 reveals that H1b was also supported, with a mean gender difference of 0.780 (se=0.219,  $t=3.560$ ,  $p=.000$ ). That is, in comedic violence ads where the victim and the perpetrator were of the same sex, male viewers showed a higher tendency to share the ads than female viewers.

H2 proposed that, in comedic violence ads where the victim was male, and the perpetrator was female, female viewers would display more positive attitudes toward the comedic violence ads (H2a) and would have a higher tendency to share the ads than male viewers (H2b). Table 2 indicates that, for Video 2, the mean difference in attitudes between males and females was 0.958 (se=0.191,  $t=5.025$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and the mean gender difference in intentions to share the ad was 0.734 (se=0.218,  $t=3.361$ ,  $p=.000$ ). In both cases (H2a and H2b), the results indicated significant mean differences by gender, but the direction was negative; that is, males had higher values than females in both their tendencies to share and their attitudes toward the ads.

Table 2 indicates that, for Video 3, the mean difference in attitudes between males and females was 0.823 ( $se=0.194$ ,  $t=4.236$ ,  $p=.000$ ); the mean difference in intentions to share was 0.812 ( $se=0.216$ ,  $t=3.762$ ,  $p=.000$ ). These numbers supported both H3a and H3b. In other words, in comedic violence ads where the victim was female and the perpetrator was male, male viewers indicated more positive attitudes toward the ads, and had a greater tendency to share the ads, than female viewers.

To test the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between attitudes toward comedic violence and intentions to share, we proposed H4, H5, and H6. H4 stated that, in comedic violence ads in which the perpetrator and victim are of the same sex, the impact of attitudes toward the comedic violence ads on viewers' intentions to share the ads would be higher for men than women. As shown in Table 2, the path coefficient from attitude to intention to share Video 1 was 0.576 for men and 0.611 for women, for a gender difference of -0.035 ( $se=0.254$ ,  $t=-0.2473$ ,  $p=n.s.$ ). The path coefficient from attitude to intention to share Video 4 was 0.563 for men and -0.689 for women, for a gender difference of -0.127 ( $se=0.088$ ,  $t=1.436$ ,  $p=0.076$ ). Therefore, H4 was not supported.

When examining Video 2, however, where the perpetrator was male and the victim was female, Table 2 indicates that the path coefficient from attitude to intention to share was 0.601 for men and 0.821 for women, for a gender difference of -0.219 ( $se=0.078$ ,  $t=2.815$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). H5 is not supported; that is, in comedic violence ads where the perpetrator was male and the victim was female, the impact of attitudes on intention to share the ad was higher for women than men.

H6 stated that, in comedic violence ads where the perpetrator was female and the victim was male, the impact of  $A_{cv}$  on sharing the ads should be greater for women than men. The results from Table 2 indicate that the difference of path coefficients between men and

women was -0.150, (se=0.041, t=1.608, p=0.059). H6 was therefore not supported. To facilitate discussion, Table 3 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing.

**Table 3. Hypothesis testing results.**

Hypothesis	Video	Gender Role in Videos		Hypothesized Gender Differences		Results/Decision
		Perpetrator	Victim	Male	Female	
Attitude towards comedic violence						
H1(a)	1	Males	Male	Higher	Lower	Supported
H1(a)	4	Female	Female	Higher	Lower	Supported
H2(a)	3	Female	Male	Lower	Higher	Not Supported, but significant in other direction
H3(a)	2	Male	Female	Higher	Lower	
Intention to share comedic violence						
H1(b)	1	Males	Male	Higher	Lower	Supported
H1(b)	4	Female	Female	Higher	Lower	Supported
H2(b)	3	Female	Male	Lower	Higher	Not Supported, but significant in other direction
H3(b)	2	Male	Female	Higher	Lower	
Moderating role of gender on the effect of attitudes on intention to share						
H4	1	Males	Male	Higher	Lower	Not Supported
H4	4	Female	Female	Higher	Lower	Not Supported
H5	2	Male	Female	Higher	Lower	Not Supported
H6	3	Female	Male	Lower	Higher	Not Supported

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the differences between men and women with respect to advertisements containing comedic violence, taking into consideration the gender permutation factor in four different types of videos. In particular, the present study explored gender's effect on three aspects of comedic violence in ads: attitudes toward comedic violence used in advertisements, intentions to share comedic violence ads, and the

moderating influence of gender on the relationship between attitudes and intentions to share. We found that there was a gender difference regarding attitudes toward comedic violence ads as well as intentions to share. Irrespective of the gender permutation factor, males tended to have stronger attitudes and greater intentions to share the comedic violence ads than females (H1, H2, and H3). As for the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between attitudes and intentions to share the video ads, the picture was mixed. We found that the relationship between attitudes toward comedic violence and intentions to share the videos ads did not support the hypotheses in all the four gender permutation scenarios. The impact of attitudes toward comedic violence on the intention to share the video was stronger for men than women when the female victimized the male. On the other hand, attitudes toward comedic violence had greater impact on intention to share comedic violence content for women than men when males victimized females. There was no significant difference in the impact of attitudes toward comedic violence on the intention to share comedic violence between men and women, when both the perpetrator and victims were of the same sex. Therefore, the moderating role of the gender on the impact of attitudes toward intention to share comedic violence is still unclear.

### *Contribution to Literature*

While prior studies (e.g., Gulas et al., 2010) focused on gender differences in comedic violence preferences, this study is the first to take into consideration the gender permutation factor in different types of advertisements. It advances the literature on comedic violence advertisements in several ways: First, we directly addressed the call for research into gender permutations (Roux et al., 2017; Swani et al., 2013; Yoon & Lee, 2018) by developing new insights into the impact of different gender roles (as the perpetrator or victim of the comedic violence) on viewers' reactions toward the comedic violence.

Second, we advanced the biological-sex disposition to violence (Groch, 1974) and disposition theory (Zillman & Cantor, 1976; Zillmann, 1983) as bases for explaining gender differences in reactions toward comedic violence when the perpetrator was male and victim was male or female, and when the perpetrator was female, and the victim was female as well. The present study established that, in those circumstances, males enjoyed the comedic violence more than females, due to positive disposition effects toward males and the inherent tendency of males to enjoy violence (Smith, 1984). We argue that, given advances in gender equality, males are becoming less sensitive and more accepting of portrayals of women controlling men. However, despite advances in gender equality, males still experience mirth when a woman metes out comedic violence on a man.

We also found additional evidence that the impact of people's attitudes toward violence on their intentions to share that violence depends on the permutations of the gender roles in the comedic violence. If both the perpetrator and the victim are of the same sex, then there are no gender differences on the effect of attitudes on intentions to share. On the other hand, if the perpetrator and the victim are of the opposite sex, then a significant gender difference exists on the effect of attitudes on intentions to share. These findings are largely consistent with prior studies (Yoon & Kim, 2014), in that men react more positively than women toward comedic violence ads. However, the boundary conditions we discovered were different; that is, we found that the interplay of gender roles in the comedic violence advertisements mattered. The results suggested that individuals were more favorable toward same-sex than opposite-sex comedic violence advertisements.

### *Managerial Implications*

In conclusion, gender differences existed in the effects of people's attitudes toward comedic violence ads on whether they shared the ads. However, those gender differences disappeared when the victim and the perpetrator in the advertisement were of the same sex.

This is important for marketers who target different market segments, especially when they use gender as one of their criteria. Our research can, therefore, serve a guidance for marketers when they consider using comedic violence as a theme for online advertisement, that is, it is important not only to consider gender differences in audiences but also permutation effect of the gender role play.

#### *Limitation and Future research Directions*

An advantage of this study was that we used real video ads to solicit consumer opinions. However, the study also suffered from limitations. For example, the backgrounds and other factors of the interviewees may have had some impact on the results (Choi et al., 2018). In future research, confounding factors such as industry sector, respondent culture, violence level of the ad, and humor level, should be carefully controlled for through multi-experimental designs. Nevertheless, the findings of our study provide exploratory evidence that gender permutations in comedic violence ads are an importance factor to consider.

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